

CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Support. Advocate. Prevent.

Testimony of Ashlei Flemming
Post Conviction Victim Advocate
Committee on Judiciary
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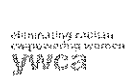
Support: SB 3 An Act Combating Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Ashlei Flemming, and I am a post-conviction Victim's Advocate at *The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence*. I have served as an advocate for victims in our community in both a personal and professional capacity for over a decade and I strive to honor the needs of each individual survivor that I come into contact with.

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of SB 3, An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment. For most sexual assault crimes, Connecticut law provides survivors of sexual violence with a mere five-year statute of limitations to bring their offenders to justice, or, to find redress in the civil court. Connecticut has the third shortest statute of limitations in the country and the shortest overall in New England. The impacts of sexual violence can last a lifetime, but for survivors of sexual violence, the chance to seek help through our criminal justice system does not.

There is very often a wide variation of experiences for survivors following the trauma of sexual violence. These reactions can include but are certainly not limited to PTSD, self-blame, shame, scrutinization, and loss of social supports upon disclosing or reporting the abuse. Many victims require extended amounts of time and information in order to understand that they are not to blame for someone else's actions. Coming to the realization that they are not at fault for being sexually assaulted can be emotional on its own for a victim because it requires acknowledging vulnerability. Victims can take years to come to that level of awareness in even the most supportive conditions. Unfortunately, some victims are preyed upon specifically because of their lack of support or dependence otherwise on an offender.

If a victim comes to terms with their loss of autonomy, they are then confronted with the decision of disclosing to someone that they feel they can trust. If the person that they disclose to is unsupportive or seems to question the victim's judgment even slightly, it can halt any further reporting for years. In the best case scenario, a victim rapidly comes to terms with what has happened to them and they disclose to someone who is supportive who can encourage them when doubt or nervousness crops up. But this does not account for the additional level of hesitance that can come with reporting to law enforcement which can be very intimidating m, especially when the victim is all too often acquainted with the offender in professional or social circles.



Victims often feel the weight of an offender's physical, social, or financial power when they are deciding whether or not to proceed through the legal system. These influences can have very real, comprehensive impacts on the lives of victims and should be very seriously considered when there is any conversation around the statute of limitations for sexual crimes. I would also urge you to consider how uncomfortable many people here today would find it to discuss, with strangers, in a professional legal setting, the sexual engagements that they willingly take part in. Then consider the level of humility that would be required to discuss, (in detail) sexual acts that were committed against one's will in a public, professional setting. It is not hard to imagine that our justice system should exhibit some patience for this process.

I carry with me the survival stories of upwards of 14 people that have been sexually assaulted and have yet to proceed with legal action and the public scrutiny it (unfortunately) still entails. For some of these victims, not reporting around the time of the offense is literally or perceptually how they survived the abuse.

I have worked professionally and personally with other victims for years, and across the board, victims have so much to worry about. The saying is that time heals, but with regards to the current statute limitations, time is just another contender. Let's give victims one less thing to battle, by providing them with more time.

At 5 years, Connecticut's civil and criminal statute of limitations has one of the shortest time frames in the country for many victims of sexual assault. It is too short. 28 states have either no statute of limitations for a period of 20 years or more. Connecticut should follow in the footsteps of these states and not limit the time victims of sexual assault can seek justice.

I urge you to pass SB 3 An Act Combating Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment to give victims time.

Thank you.

Ashlei Flemming